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STATE FOR EAP/MTS MICHAEL TAYLOR

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: FORMER PRESIDENT RAMOS RULES OUT BURMA ENVOY ROLE

REF: A. STATE 142628

- [1](#)B. MANILA 3418
- [1](#)C. MANILA 3393 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a lengthy October 17 private breakfast meeting with the Ambassador, former Philippine President Fidel Ramos declined -- despite strong encouragement -- the suggestion that he could step forward as a candidate for ASEAN special envoy for Burma (reftel A). Ramos cited a full schedule of international and domestic obligations, saying that he instead preferred to concentrate his already taxed attention and energies on domestic Philippine issues. The former president nonetheless offered his views on Burma, and went on to broach a variety of domestic political topics (latter to be reported septel). END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) The Ambassador opened the breakfast with a discussion of recent developments in Burma, and the intense international effort to find ways to move the country toward greater democratization. She noted to Ramos that many international observers believed an ASEAN special envoy for Burma could be of assistance to UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari in his continuing efforts to make progress with the junta, and she explained that in a recent discussion with President Arroyo, she had raised Ramos' name as an excellent candidate for any such position. The Ambassador pointed out that President Ramos's broad combination of military and political experience constituted the best possible qualifications for dealing with Burma's military junta. (Ramos, a West Point graduate, served as chief of staff of the Philippine armed forces and Secretary of Defense prior to his term as President -- during which he visited Burma.) The Ambassador likewise underscored how Ramos' 1999 founding of the Ramos Peace and Development Foundation, as well as his membership in the ASEAN Eminent Persons Group, gave him the stature needed to be an effective advocate for democracy with the regime.

[1](#)3. (C) Ramos explained that, while flattered at the suggestion he might be a good envoy, he felt that his frequent international travel left him insufficient time to deal with pressing domestic political issues in the Philippines, and mentioned that he had declined similar overtures in the past. Ramos went on to say that he wants to be more actively engaged in domestic matters such as the Mindanao peace process and the continuing evolution of civil-military relations.

[1](#)4. (C) Returning to the theme of Burma, Ramos opined that based on his own experience several years back with the junta, he agreed with Foreign Minister George Yeo of

Singapore, the current ASEAN chair, that the military would likely seek to play a significant role in any lasting solution to Burma's problems. He offered the view that the regime's current intransigence might be partly rooted in a belief that Burma's military feared an "all or nothing" scenario that required their complete departure from Burma's power structures, a clear threat to the military's survival. Lastly, Ramos echoed the widely held sentiment that greater engagement on the part of China was key to faster progress, but added that he thought Russia might be able to play a more influential role than many envisioned.

15. (C) Ramos afterwards touched on a variety of domestic political matters, including Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's corruption-scandal headaches, progress in the Mindanao peace process, as well as perennial rumors of unrest and disloyalty among certain elements in the military. These topics of the discussion will be reported septel.
KENNEY